

Doger

The Thornwood Subdivision

Alan Barnett

Area 522

Fall 1991

While the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor came as a surprise to Americans, the war and its associated challenges were anticipated long before the dawn of December 7, 1941. The entry of the United States into World War II brought an end to private home construction across the nation as building materials were channeled into defense projects. The resulting housing shortage was foreseen as early as October 1940 when Congress passed a bill "to expedite the provision of housing in connection with national defense, and for other purposes." <sup>x Note</sup> The law defined those connected with national defense to include enlisted military personnel, civilian military employees, and workers in essential defense related industries.

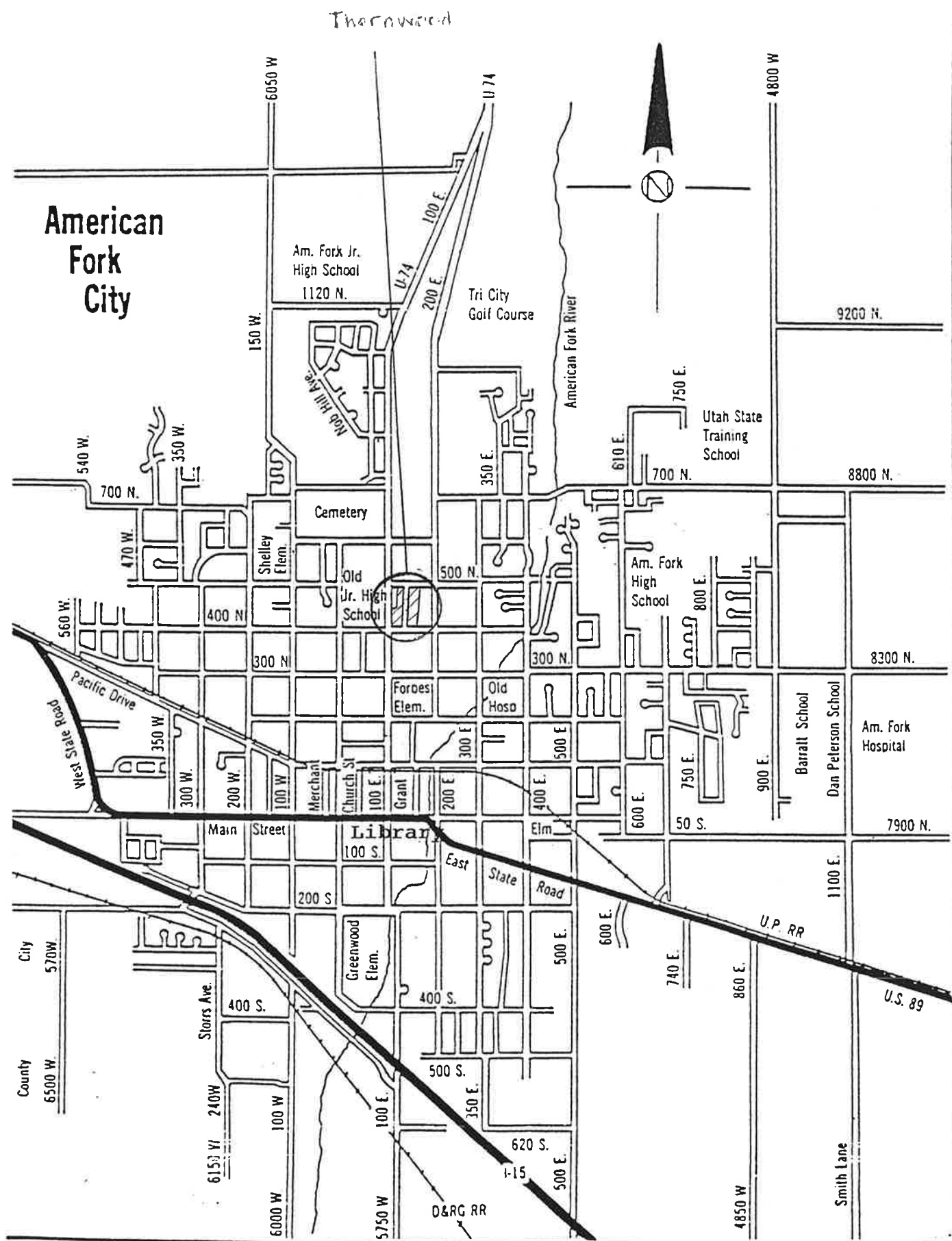
That same year a tremendous expansion of these defense industries was set in motion. As US Steel stepped up its operations the decision was made to build a large steel mill in Utah Valley on the shore of Utah Lake. Construction commenced in April 1942. The plant was the largest of the US Steel war-time projects and employed 15,000 workers at the peak of the construction process in 1943. Barracks on the site provided housing for about 1500 single men. In addition the Federal Public Housing Authority provided about 50 trailers to accommodate families. When completed and in operation the mill employed about 5000 workers and added an estimated 20,000 residents to the population of the area.<sup>2</sup>

In response to this influx of workers the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), operating under the terms of the 1941 Defense Housing Legislation, authorized new construction to accommodate

2500 homes in the various communities near the plant.<sup>3</sup> Among these homes were those comprising the Thornwood subdivision in American Fork.

Carl Ohren purchased a parcel of land northeast of 100 East and 400 North on what was then the outskirts of American Fork. In November 1943 he submitted a subdivision map for the property. Ohren had just moved to American Fork that same year. He was a native of Utah, but had lived in California for some time, where he had become involved in doing general contracting along with his father and his brother, John Lloyd. *\* Note* Although Carl had been a resident of American Fork only a short time, he was elected to the city council in 1944 where he served a two-year term. During this time he was involved in the installation of a city sewer system. In 1948 Ohren moved to Salt Lake City where he continued constructing subdivisions, including the 900-home Meadowbrook Farms. *- date + location?* During the five years that Carl lived in American Fork he and his brother Lloyd (as he was most commonly known) left their mark on the town in the form of three war-time subdivisions. These include not only Thornwood, but also the East Lane and the Ohren-King Street subdivisions. *Location of these 2 in comparison to Thornwood.*

Laid out, the Thornwood subdivision was comprised of five lots along 100 East and 20 lots laid out along both sides of the newly created Thornwood Drive. The individual lots vary somewhat in shape and size but run roughly between 7000 and 8000 square feet in area. *- Length - X - width please* Thornwood Drive itself follows a gently curved path surrounded by an otherwise gridiron street pattern. While this bend in the street lends a touch of the picturesque to the

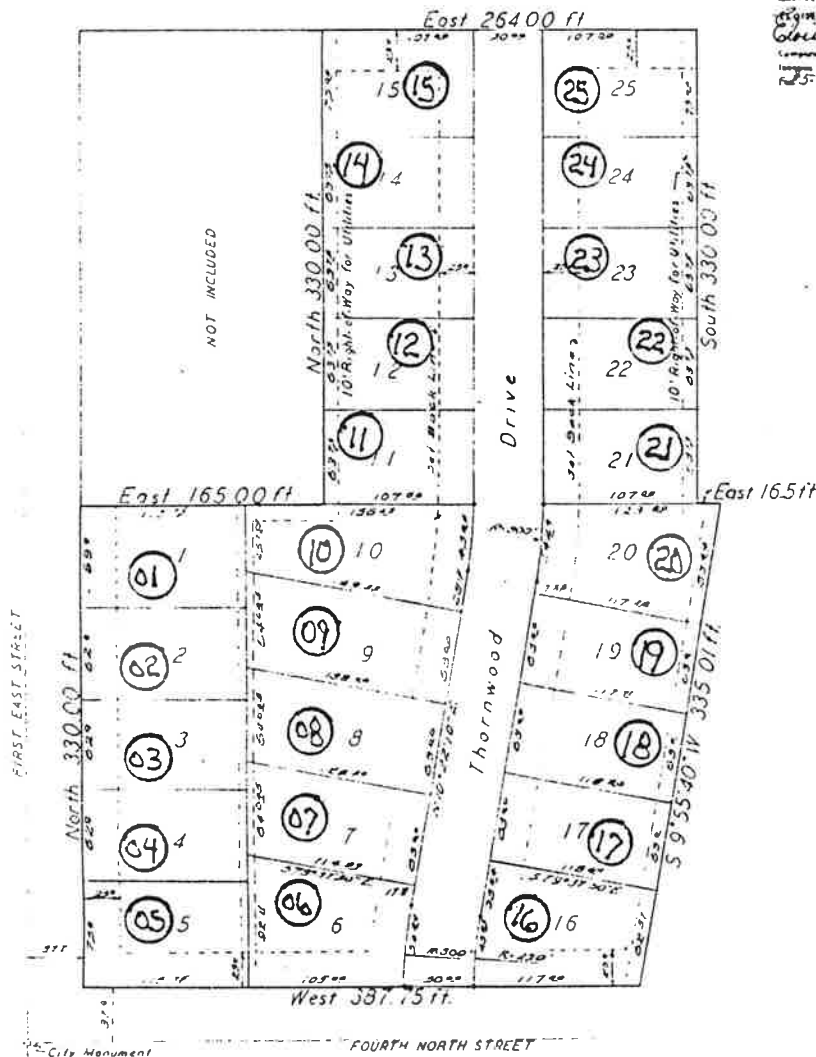


184 F 781

# THORNWOOD SUBDIVISION

A SUBDIVISION OF A PART OF BLOCK 45, PLAT "A"

AMERICAN FORK CITY SURVEY OF BUILDING LOTS



Survey No. 11919  
 Registered in the office of  
 NOV 18 1943  
 Clerk of the County  
 Recorder  
 Fred L. Markham  
 American Fork City  
 Planning Board



## SURVEYOR'S CERTIFICATE

I, A. R. Shelton, a registered professional engineer and land surveyor as prescribed under the laws of the state of Utah, and holding certificate No. 746, do hereby certify the tract of land shown on this map and owned by Carl R. Ohman, a single man, is situated in American Fork City, Utah County, State of Utah, and is more particularly described as follows: to wit:

Beginning at the Southwest Corner of Block 45, Plat "A", American Fork City Survey of Building Lots, thence North 330.00 ft., thence East 165.00 ft., thence North 330.00 ft., thence East 264.00 ft.; thence South 330.00 ft., thence East 165.00 ft., thence South 9°35'40" West 335.01 ft., thence West 387.75 ft. to the place of beginning.

That I have, by authority of said owner herein named, subdivided said land into lots and a street to be known as THORNWOOD SUBDIVISION.

And that the same has been correctly surveyed and is as shown on this map.

Date November 11, 1943

A. R. Shelton  
 A. R. Shelton, Surveyor

## RECORDER'S CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this plat was filed in my office this 22 day of December, A. D., 1943.

Utah County Recorder

## OWNER'S DEDICATION

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS -

That Carl R. Ohman, a single man, owner of the above described tract of land, having caused the same to be divided into lots and a street to be known as THORNWOOD SUBDIVISION does hereby dedicate for the perpetual use of the public the parcel of land designated hereon as THORNWOOD DRIVE, a street 50 ft wide, and subject to rights-of-way 10 ft wide as shown on this map.

Carl R. Ohman  
 Carl R. Ohman

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

On this 11th day of November, A. D. 1943, personally appeared before me, Carl R. Ohman, a single man, who duly acknowledged to me that he executed the same.

Carl R. Ohman

## APPROVAL

Presented to the Utah County Planning Board and the director authorized to approve, and to the American Fork City Planning Board and the chairman authorized to approve.

Date 11-18-43 Date 11-14-43

Fred L. Markham, Director  
 Utah County Planning Board  
 Harold Hatter, Chairman  
 American Fork City Planning Board

## APPROVAL

Presented to the American Fork City Council and the City Mayor authorized to approve.

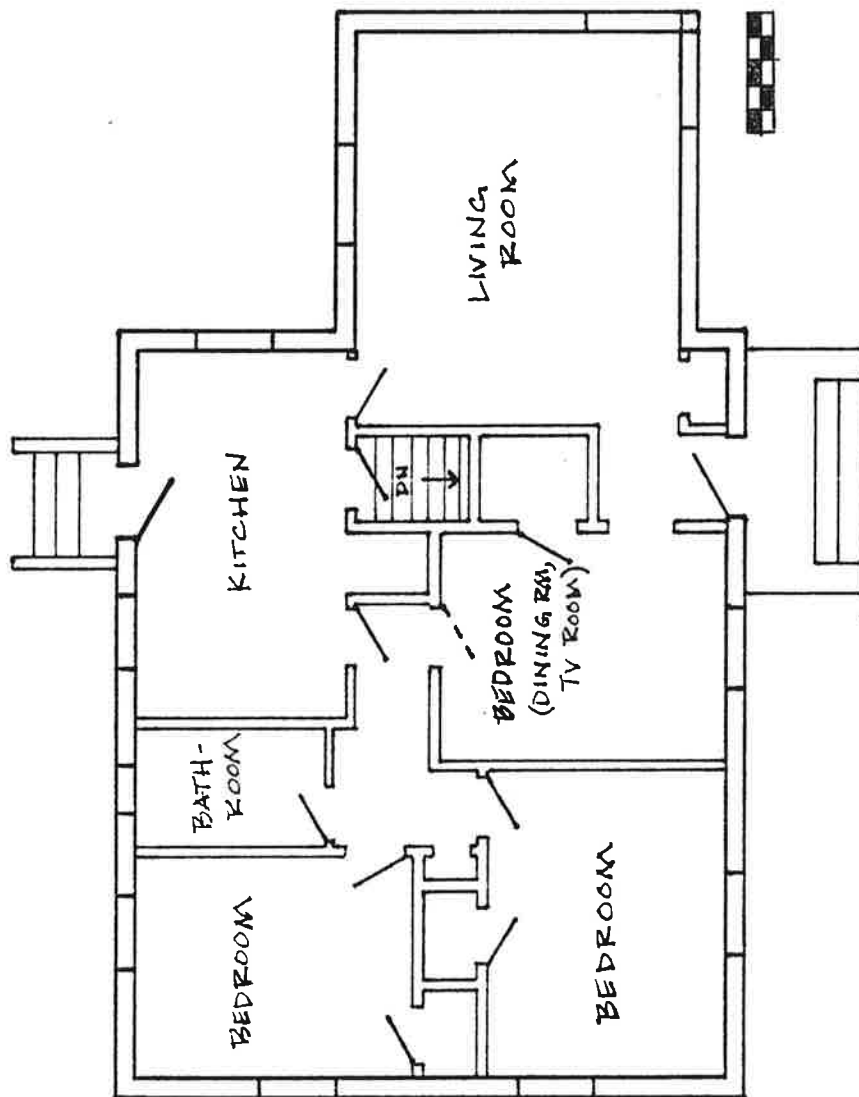
Mayor  
 City Clerk

subdivision, examination of the subdivision map suggests that it was the result of practical rather than aesthetic considerations. The odd configuration of the purchased by Carl Ohran required the bend to allow for building lots of approximately equal size on both sides of the street.

In addition to the street the Ohran brothers installed gutters along Thornwood Drive, but no curb or sidewalks. Water and other utilities were provided for each home; and each was equipped with a septic tank because the city sewer system was not created until several years after the subdivision was built.

Construction of the houses themselves began at the south end of the subdivision and progressed north up the street. It seems that the Ohrans used two floor plans which were only simple variations of each other. The kitchen and bedroom portion of the house, as illustrated by the home of Frederick and Florence Fish, *see fig.* remained standard in all the plans, while only the exact position and orientation of the living room varied. Each home had nearly 1000 square feet of living space on the main floor, which included a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and three bedrooms. While a dining room was too much of a luxury for war-time housing it is clear that the Ohran brothers had not left it out of their planning. In the case of the Fish house, the "bedroom" adjoining the entry hall never had a door to separate it from the entryway, making it evident that the room was not only suited to, but even intended for use as public rather than private space.

The Fish house, and presumably the rest of the homes in the subdivision, included an unfinished basement under the main



FISH HOUSE

portion of the building and a crawl space storage area underneath the living room. The basement originally housed a coal-fired furnace as well as a chute and room for storing coal.

On the exterior, the houses in the subdivision are of a very vague, non-descript colonial revival style. While the gables on most of them are clad in wood siding, all the homes are otherwise masonry. The use of brick in defense housing was by no means standard and its use in all three of the Ohran subdivisions in American Fork may be a reflection of the Ohran brothers' background as brick masons.

The consistent use of brick, the continuity of style, and the uniformity of plan give the street a particular unity and homogeneity even today. Nevertheless, the basic uniformity is not readily apparent on a first perusal of the street. Through variation of a number of exterior details the Ohrans were able to create 25 individual houses, similar but no two exactly alike. Three or four colors of brick were used throughout the subdivision. Most roofs were gabled, but a few were hipped. Some porch roofs were gabled, others were hipped, and still others were simple shed roofs. Window size and placement, particularly in the living room section, are varied and several different styles of front door are used. Such manipulations are effective in preventing the stereotyped "cookie-cutter" effect often associated with modern housing projects.

As far as the yard surrounding the houses were concerned, the developers included only minimal improvements. Maple trees were planted along the street in front of each house. Linnaea,

photos should  
show more  
of this.  
/ or by  
drawing



all landscaping was left to those who purchased the homes. A concrete slab provided parking for a single automobile for each dwelling and no garages were included on the lots.

This spartan approach to the yards, as well as the overall compact nature of the houses is indicative of the restrictions imposed by the 1940 housing bill. With the purpose of conserving building materials and providing affordable housing for defense workers in mind, the legislation, as amended in April 1941, stipulated that "the cost per family dwelling unit shall not exceed an average of [\$3,500] . . . and the cost of no family dwelling unit shall exceed \$3,950."<sup>4</sup>

The entire Thornwood subdivision cost about \$140,000 to construct. It was reported that in the three Ohran projects sold for an average price of \$5500 (the earlier legislated standard not with standing). The average price for the Thornwood houses was likely somewhat higher because they were larger than those in the other two subdivisions. The fact that the Fishes bought their home for \$6000 in 1947 suggests that without government regulation of prices the post-war housing shortage pushed up the cost of homes.

Loans required for the construction and purchase of the houses were provided through local financial institutions, but were underwritten by the FHA. By FHA guidelines home-buyers were required to make a 10% down payment. the Peoples State Bank of American Fork was the primary lending institution for the Ohran projects and held many of the mortgages for homes in the Thornwood subdivision. This role is emphasized by the fact that

Clifford E. Young, president of the bank, was listed in the protective covenants as a member of the three-man committee responsible for approving the plans for alterations and outbuildings in the subdivision. As an LDS general authority and a former stake president for the American Fork area, Young's association with the project undoubtedly lent it additional credibility.

In addition to establishing the committee, the protective covenants placed a number of restrictions on the property in the subdivision. Among these was the stipulation that "No trailer, basement, tent, shack, garage, barn, or other outbuilding erected in the tract shall at anytime be used as a residence temporarily or permanently."<sup>5</sup> Houses built in the tract were required to cost at least \$4000 and have a minimum ground floor area of 800 square feet. Such restrictions as these for a subdivision in which the developer has built all the homes suggests that a somewhat standardized covenant version was adopted. Included in this standard document was the common restriction that "no person who is of any race other than the white race shall use or occupy any building or any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race domiciled with an owner or tenant."<sup>6</sup>

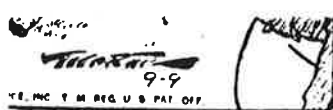
Needless to say, those who moved into the new subdivision were Caucasians. According to Mr. and Mrs. Fish, residents of the neighborhood in the late 1940's were primarily young, LDS, Utah natives with one or two children. Although the subdivision was intended to provide housing for workers at Geneva Steel, at

*But that was 1947  
what about earlier residents  
in 44 if use were  
available*

the time the Frances moved in only a quarter of the male residents were employed at Geneva. In addition the community included a couple of farmers, a school teacher, a principal, an insurance salesman and several small business owners.

As part of the defense housing effort supervised by the FHA, the Thornwood homes were initially available only to defense workers. For this reason the subdivision was not widely advertised. Eventually some subdivisions were opened up for purchase by the general public. This was apparently the case with Thornwood. On September 10, 1944 a single advertisement appeared in the Provo Daily Herald, announcing that "a limited number" of homes would be available in "beautiful Thorn Wood subdivision" on September 15. It may be that many of the non-defense workers in the subdivision bought their homes after this date or purchased them from Geneva Steel Workers who left after the war.

In comparison to the East Lane and King Street subdivisions the appearance of Thornwood has changed relatively little. The most noticeable difference is that the once barren looking lots have mature vegetation. The tiny maple trees have grown so that they form a canopy over the street. Fences have been erected around yards where formerly there were none. Most homeowners long ago built a two-car garage on their property and the uniform white painted trim has given way to a variety of colors. Houses have been re-roofed so that roofing materials and colors do not match. In a number of cases owners have expanded their living rooms. On the interior, many if not all of the residents have at



By ROY CRANE



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cheap transportation

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# Naylor Au

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PHONES 676—

Used Car Lot—First South

Sunday Herald Provo Utah  
Sun. Sept. 10, 1944

sometime done as the Fishes did and finished off the basement. Fred Fish related that he worked many hours in the evening and into the night building a recreation room and a workshop in his basement. Uses of rooms may have changed as well. The Fishes initially used all three bedrooms in their home, but for a time put both their daughters in a single room and used the extra room as a dining room until the daughters became dissatisfied and the room reverted to its use as a bedroom. After their children were grown the Fishes made the room into a TV room.

The demographics of the neighborhood have changed in some ways over the years but not in others. Most of the early residents are gone. Furthermore, while the subdivision was first comprised of young families, roughly two-thirds of the homeowners are elderly retired people. Despite such changes the subdivision remains caucasian and almost exclusively LDS. Although many are retired, the professional background of today's residents is quite similar to that of the people who lived there in the late 1940's.

Conclusion

ENDNOTES

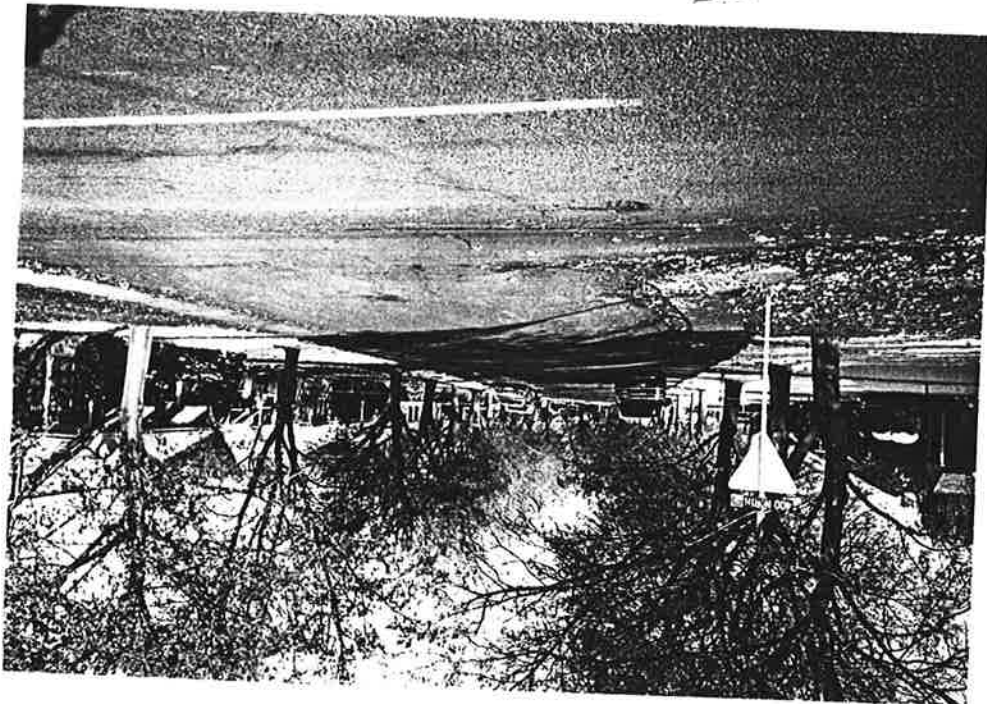
1. Polk's Provo City Directory. (1944), p. 11.
2. "Geneva Works Fulfills Pioneer's Dream," US Steel News, October 1943, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 3.
3. "New Steel Plant Is Fully Integrated," US Steel News, October 1943, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 6.
4. US Statutes. Vol 54, part 1, p. 1126; Vol 55, part 1, p. 147
5. Declaration of Protective Covenants and Restrictions Applying to Thornwood Subdivision, American Fork City, Utah, Book 385, p. 233-234.
6. Declaration of Protective Covenants and Restrictions Applying to Thornwood Subdivision, American Fork City, Utah, Book 385, p. 234.

Bibliog 77



*Examples of the two basic floor plan types*

Thurston House 1992



Fish House 1992

